MY DREAM LIFE

BELLE BUSHNELL

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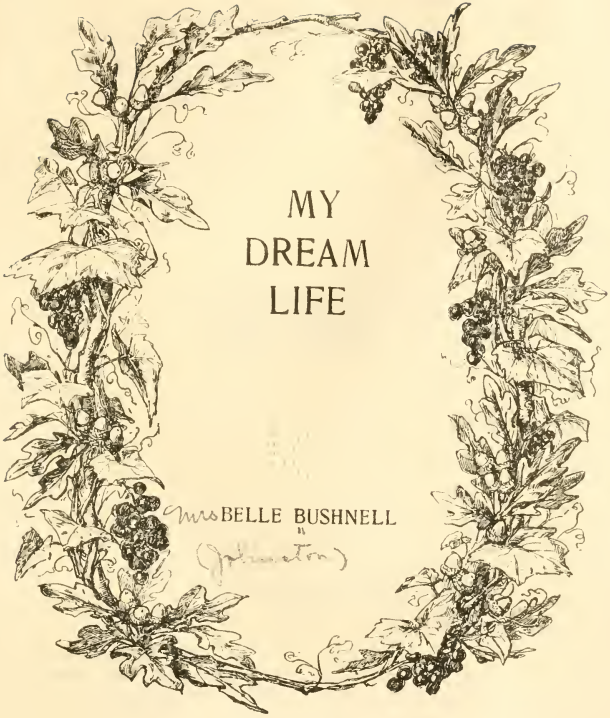
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BELLE BUSHNELL

PS3503
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By Belle Bushnell
Washington, D. C.

APR 19 1915

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BALTIMORE

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Life, Love, A Raven's Feather

Life, Love, A Raven's Feather

MAY day. A garden of ever blooming roses. And Life with Springtime in her soul, walked the ways, without companion other than Nature. And Life was brave, Life was earnest, and Life kept on, on, triumphing. Then time grew apace; but all the while Life kept going, going, over the glades and up the hills,

culling roses. Today a rare rose of pure white, on the morrow a darksome, crimson one, maybe.

THEN came the midsummer day, and Life went seeking, seeking, but she knew not for what, until she came upon another in the glade, then Life spoke softly to herself:

"I see, I see one all unknown to me, or is it only a shadow? no, I see it is too bright for a shadow. All golden he looks, and lo! he comes to me, I will ask his name."

And the stranger came and stood at the side of Life. And Life said:

"You are very beautiful, all bright gold and white, while I am a dull crimson and gray. Oh, but look, see how your light causes my crimson to glow, and fades the gray away. Then too, the light has entered my soul. I feel a new force within me, I feel exhilarant. And, Golden One, I feel that all these strange, new, beautiful sensations, come to me, through you. It is well I met you in the glade today, or I may never have known you; and now you must never leave my side. But your name, have you a name other than 'Beautiful,' Golden One?"

"Yes, a name, and Life I have ever been in your path. But Springtime wrapped you in her youthful meshes, and scattered her little pale blossoms over your eyes. But on this midsummer

day, Spring let the blossoms play with Zephyr, leaving your eyes uncovered. Then, Life, you awakened, and Summer entered and enthralled your soul, and your soul called for that which makes Life perfect. Thus walking in the glade with uncovered eyes, you soon beheld me idling in your path, and beholding me, your soul brought me to your side, and dear Life, my name is Love."

"Love, ah, the name bespeaks Life, Life in fullness. Is it not true, dear Love?"

"It is true, dear Life. Life with Love; Love with Life, makes all perfect. And thus we must walk, hand in hand, through our paths till eternity, or winter will enter your soul."

For a season Life kept Love closely

at her side: Life becoming purified, Love glorified, as they walked the ways hand in hand, over the glades, and up the hills, together culling roses of sunset tints, and finding never one of a darksome hue.

THEN again time grew apace. And on a midautumn day the roses drooped on their stems, sadly letting fall a petal here and there, as Love and Life entered the glade. And Zephyr whispered

through the vines, and the roses heard Zephyr say:

"We must hasten, cover, and give all warmth we can call forth to our poor roses, or they will be blighted, anon."

"But why?" asked Myrtle and Woodbine, "why say you this?"

And Zephyr made answer:

"Do you not see Life has dropped Love's hand. She walks alone, and look, Woodbine and Myrtle, and tell me, do you not see that Life is seeking? Now watch with care and you will see that the Gray One, whom I came upon this morning in the middle glade, will be somewhere near, and entice Life to his side. But woe to us! while we whisper the Gray One has come, come, and Life holds him by the hand. But hark, Life speaks."

And the vines listened, holding their leaves still, still, and they heard Life say:

"Ah, another stranger has entered my garden. But you look gray, and dull, and wolfish, I could never call you beautiful like the Golden One."

"No, I am neither beautiful nor docile, though I am companion of half the world." Thus replied the Gray One as he grasped Life's hand.

And Life replied:

"Companion to half the world? and until this day I have seen you not. Why so, can you tell?"

"Why so? yes, I can quickly tell. For a short time you have been calling me to your side. I hovered in your footsteps, but could not approach near enough for you to behold me. That was while Love held your hand, and

you walked side by side, with Truth and Harmony your companions, and summertime in your soul. But today I could draw nearer, and I sent, through the air, a Raven's feather, it fell at your feet, you withdrew your hand from Love's clasp, you reached for the feather, you held it before your eyes. Then your eyes sought and beheld me: now I hold your hand with the feather between. And it will lead you to a world beyond your garden. I will not be your only companion. The Raven's feather will bring a multitude to your realm, and among the throng in high estate, you will find Avarice, Lust, and Insincerity, with Jealousy in close pursuit."

"But, Stranger, even with the multitude, I would fain keep Love at my side, I will call him to me. I would not be

Life without Love, and Love would not be Love without Life to walk the glades beside him."

Then the Gray One pressed closer the feather to Life's palm, and in harsh, snarling tones cried:

"Yes, call Love to your side, but look, look back, and you will see he has not taken a step since you dropped his hand. Look, look closely, too, and you will see how broken and old he is today, and see, he stands looking down, down on the dark earth, instead of following and reclaiming your hand. Will you now call to him? have you no pride of self, Life?"

And Life answered:

"It is as you say, but until this moment I had thought Love beautiful, and called him 'Golden One.' And

now he looks all leaden, dull gray leaden, and I think, I think I am tired culling roses, and Stranger, I will go with you. You can be my companion, and lead me to your world. But your name, you too must have a name, tell it that you may no longer be a stranger to Life."

"Yes, my name, you shall carry it on your lips, for the time is here, and it has been dormant in your heart for near a season, awaiting the Raven's feather. But now you will foster it with Discord's hand in thine. Yes, Life, Discord, the offspring of Desire and Inquietude, will lead you from your garden of everblooming roses." Thus again snarled the Gray One.

"Discord, Desire, Inquietude. Oh, they seem afar from Love. They have the sound of tears, and woe, and death,

death for Life. And Gray One, I fear, I fear, and my hands grow cold. I think, I think I will call to the Leaden One," cried Life in a despairing voice.

And Discord quickly drew Life's trembling hands to his bosom, letting them gather warmth from the fluttering Raven, as it lay against his own cold breast. From this Life gained a strength. Then Discord knowing Victory was his, smiled, and led life to the world beyond the rose garden.

All the while Zephyr and the wood vines had not stirred a breath or leaf, but with Life passing, Zephyr arose fanning soft little waves about Life's beautiful head, carrying with them the plaintive pleadings of gentle Myrtle and Woodbine, and Zephyr, too, had whispered thus:

"Life, dear Life, renounce the Gray One, he leads you to tears and woe, and death. Draw back your hand while yet there is time, hasten, and clasp tightly Love's white hand in thine."

And a Mavis, singing in a tall cypress nearby, sent with Zephyr the notes of his love song, *Tril-i-ree, Tril-i-ree* (Love is all, Love is all). But Life's heart was stilled to their love pleadings, and she kept going, going faster, and farther away, and Zephyr in despair, flew after her calling aloud:

"Life, dear Life, turn, look upon Love, see he lies crushed on the dark earth. But lo! I see Happiness with all her companions hastily coming to his aid. Yes all, and look Life, they are lifting him in their arms. They are bearing him to the hills. Yes, see how

tenderly Patience and Benevolence bear him between them, and see, Purity holds his head, while Chastity carries his tired feet, and fans him with her white willow bough. Oh Life, have you no regrets?"

But while the gentle Zephyr pleaded, Life without looking backward passed through the glades and from the garden, leaving the Mavis still singing *Tril-i-ree, Tril-i-ree* (Love is all, Love is all).

And still again time had grown apace, and the years rolled on, and on, while Life kept seeking, seeking. She had climbed high mountains in her endeavor

to reach a narrow, sunlit path, and found it in shadow. She had passed through deep, dark, lonesome ways, with high, jagged rocks, moss and lichen covered, hanging between her and the blue over head. She had lived in palaces and in huts, until this midwinter day when she could go no farther, and then had fallen on a bed of dead oak leaves. There worn, wrecked, the once beautiful Life lay on the cold, damp leaves of the forest, with winter in her heart, and frost on her long waving hair.

The sun had passed, and heavy night-clouds hung low, and Harpies came and stood in the thickets of Night-shade, waiting, watching. And these were Life's last companions. And Life moaned aloud:

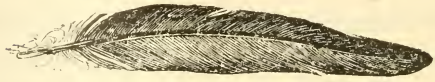
"I have been over the long, long ways, seeking, always seeking for something to fill the void in my heart, and naught have I found worthy of Love's place. Why so? I have asked many times, and no one of the multitude could answer. Now I am dying, dying and alone. My heart beats slowly, slowly, and the light is fading, Yes this is death. I am cold, cold with fear, and alone.

Oh Love, Golden One, if I could feel your hand in mine, it would be more precious than all the multitude. But now it is adieu, dear Love, adieu, for Death stands at my side with the Raven in his hand."

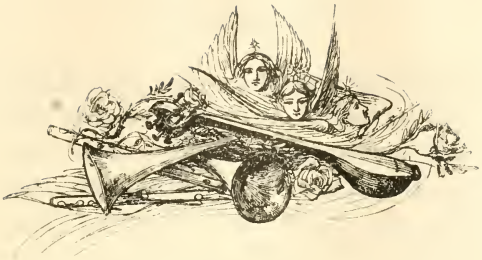
Life's sad, moanful, lamentations reached the hills, where Echo sent them afar.

Then Night's deep silence crept into the forest, and the heavy hoar-frost gathered, and covered like a pall Life on her bed of withered leaves.

Life had paid the ransom.



L'Immortel



L'Immortel

AT the age of twenty-one I was a pale, tall youth, with dark eyes which seemed to cover the entire upper half of my thin face. So dense and dark weremy brows and lashes that they contrasted strongly with my almost flaxen hair.

For three years I had been a student at the Episcopal Seminary, and when

nearing the end of the last term I was stricken with a fever that reached the brain, causing delirium for weeks and laying me low for months. At that time my father was rector of Saint Mary's. He wished me to study to take orders, and in time to fill his place. This was not to my taste, I rebelled, I had heard too much of the Church, of sermons, and the pulpit. For generations the men of my father's family had been of the church. I had lived in its atmosphere, and was left entirely without knowledge of the world until I entered college.

Of my life these three years I could not, would not, write, had they not ended with my purification. As I have stated, I was as a child when I left my father's house, and in my ignorance I

was led. I became the joke, the scapegoat, of all.

The teachings of my fathers were forgotten in my haste to learn the ways to boast, to drink intoxicating liquors, to smoke, and to gamble. Yes, I will tell even that, the blackest part, the blackest of arts. I, John Montague, had learned to gamble, to gamble away the bread money my father had earned by preaching God's Word to help men live. His daily life, his work was beautiful, the best man can live. All this I now know, and his teachings, they too were all for my good. But I had gone astray, had wandered from his fold in my boastful attempt to become a man,—a manly man, as I had then come to believe that none other than those who could partake of the vices could be

a really manly man, one to be admired and emulated.

In my attempt to perfect myself in all the leading vices I had become steeped in the deepest dregs of disgrace and humility. Word was sent my father disclosing my disgrace. He could not come himself, but instead sent a letter each day begging, praying me to desist, to restrain myself, to cast the untruths from my life. For a time I fell under his spell, I remembered his words, his holy words, they came floating from the pulpit to my ears. Then again I wandered, and went still deeper, and now as a self punishment I will tell that his letters, my dear father's letters were cast aside unopened, unread. For weeks they were treated thus, then by the hand of God I was purified.

The fever was sent me. I was stricken at the darkest moment of my life, should I live a thousand years. That day the second message was sent my father, and now I must go, the authorities had so decreed. My father was coming to my aid, this was made known to me at the evening hour when I should have been in the chapel. The proctor was making his rounds and found me in a small room where I was gambling with one other. Plain in view the stakes were on the table, my last shilling of bread money, the other a bright bit of steel, holding four life taking missiles, two for each. This we had agreed upon, but which should be the first to use it? Then came the thought of playing for the privilege of being the first to perform the sinful,

cowardly act of taking one's own life. The door had opened, the proctor saw and gave the alarm, though not before telling me my father was due to arrive that very hour. I had been expelled as unfit to longer abide within the seminary walls. The words echoed about the room 'father coming, your father coming' and the while my eyes were glued to the bit of steel on the table, and a voice sounded in my ears saying:

"Yes, look, look at the life taking thing and remember that which you were about to do. Coward thou art to have contemplated such a deed. Were you not satisfied with the depth you have gone, must you, too, part with your soul? Your heart answers not, but you will be saved for your father's sake. You shall be purified as his reward.

His life has earned the soul of his child."

The voice rang loudly in my ear. Then came another, it had spoken my name. My eyes sought the door whence it came, and on the threshold beheld my father, standing beautifully pale and tender looking, with outstretched arms to me, his son,—his disgrace.

It was then the Father of all took pity on the sinful one. My heart sent a torrent of blood to the brain; I fell forward but the outstretched arms of a devoted father caught his erring son.

For days and nights it was thought my life was slipping away, but the voice in my heart had remained and guided me back to life, a life with which to repay,—a ransom for three wasted years.

From the hour I fell into my father's arms the influence of the voice has ever been with me, in sleep, in wakefulness, but more earnest still while I was delirious. And now in my full reason I can but believe it to have been a vision of the Immortal Truth, sent to guide me to a life everlasting. The first night it spoke thus:

"John Montague, you have sinned, sinned deeply, for which you must suffer, as suffering alone will cleanse the body, purify the soul, to a whiteness that it may stand in the light of Heaven, with the hope of redemption. Thus

I have come to lead you through the path of right, to the path of life."

"But where" I asked, "how far?" And the words sounded afar to my ear, though I was conscious of my father's face, he was bending over me, and near the bed was another, with eyes like burning coals. They sought mine,—those burning eyes,—and held my gaze, while they pierced and flashed into my very brain. I thought to drop my eye lids, but they would not close, and the fiery ones scorched my brain. How long I cannot say: hours perhaps, or more likely a few seconds. Who can tell?

"Come you blighted one, come in My footsteps."

At last I was released. As the voice came I saw, I knew the eyes belonged

to the voice and I could see the lips move. The eyes shed a light over the face, the pale delicate face of a young man of my own age. This I could see, but with the feeling that a great difference lay between us. "Who are you, tell me your name?" I called out, with the thought that someone had slipped into the room to torment me, and he replied:

"Say to your white-haired father, say this: 'Give me the name of Him who will lead me through the path of right.' He can tell, he dwells in my mansion."

And I said: "Father, my father, give me the name of Him who will lead me through the path of right."

The answer came, but not until my father had dropped to his knees and prayed thus:

"Oh I thank you my Heavenly Father, the good, the great Lord God. You have saved my child. You have redeemed his soul. Blessed be Thy name forever upon his lips. Oh my Lord God, the Savior of man, Amen."

With the beginning of the prayer, with the speaking of the name, the young man with the burning eyes, had moved and stood at my father's back, resting his two hands upon father's head; but his eyes never for the space of a breath left my own.

My father's words sounded and resounded through the room long after he ceased to speak. It was thus he planted the name in my heart, while still kneeling he pressed his lips to mine, with these words between our flesh:

"My son, give yourself to the dear Lord God. He alone can lead you through the path of right, remember the name, God."

With these words came a great glow of vapory white light, covering all, until every object in the room seemed to take the form of angels floating about. And the young man, He too was changed, or had I not seen him fully? In the light I could clearly see his long waving brown hair, and slender limbs beneath the soft white robe he wore. The robe of a priest, I thought; and thinking too that his feet could not be touching the floor.

While I was pondering thus, waves of music came within my hearing. Wave after wave, and nearer they came, until I could discern the different instru-

ments. Clearly there were flutes and lutes weaving their sweet sounds with those of cymbals and silver trumpets, all.

If the others heard I did not know, I did not think, I was too intent listening to the wonderous music, drawing so near as to be at the very threshold, yes, at our threshold, and next into the very room in which I lay. But how entered it? Ah! I see, the walls had been removed. I could see out, and down the long, high-vaulted corridors. through each gray arch, and beyond to the willow green, where the blue sky drops over the stone wall. I recognized all, the enchanting vista, and was wondering why I had not thought more of the beauties during the three years, while passing to and fro daily.

Then my thoughts were again turned to the music. It was filling the space. A room no longer, for overhead were the dark blue heavens with their myriad sparkling stars. And a crescent moon hung directly above my bed.

The white vapor light had turned a pale amethyst hue; and the objects, they too had changed, changed to many numbered large white doves. Human-looking doves, with wings of long waving feathers. Music making wings as they soared upward and again down, then in circles over and about me, waving out the celestial music in their flights. And all the while, each way I looked, the burning eyes were upon me. I realized too that all I was seeing must be through these eyes, and never once had I been able to look beyond.

The young man, or priest, I had not decided which, and my father, stood side by side. My father I could see was holding, clasping to his breast, the small Holy Book he was never without. Ah, the book, the little worn book, I knew it. I had read it through once, twice, yes many times with my father when a child. I a child! when? This I called aloud, and the young man moved nearer, he and father, and the voice answered:

"Three short years ago you were pure of heart, thus a child, John Montague, and from the child you have tried to draw the soul. Do you recall your sins? Will you repent for your father's love? for the One who died for you? your Savior, your God."

For God, yes, I am ready. God will

lead me through the path of right, this my father says, was my answer.

Oh how can I tell, how can I find words to relate, that which followed! But I must endeavor.

With the name on the air, the amethyst light faded away like a sunset cloud, and a burst of gold sprung from above and beyond, enveloping all in clouds of amber,—amber that sent forth rays of light, brilliant, beautiful, dulling all else. The moon, I thought, and looking up to where the crescent had hung, when lo! the moon too, had vanished. The light, the amber light, came from a great cross of gold and upon it, upon the cross with outstretched arms and bleeding feet, was the One of the burning eyes.

I knew then, I knew the name of the

young man of the burning eyes,—the blessed Jesus Christ, and I must look, see Him upon the cross: thus to purify my soul. And my soul cried out: "Come, Oh my Lord God, come take me, lead me through the path of right to the path of life everlasting."

The amber grew brighter, the cross swayed, then began to ascend, going up, up still higher, until it reached, then passed through the sky and beyond the stars. With the passing of the cross the heavens glowed amber, purple, and gray and rose,—like unto the afterglow of a midsummer sun, and the music grew fainter and farther away as it followed the cross, leaving a milky way through the blue.

Again my soul cried aloud: "Why, oh why did you not take me? Let me

die as you, dear Lord, or let me live and serve my God."

I was spell-bound, and trembling, and thinking would it be death or life. Hesitatingly I endeavored to arise, but some invincible force held me down. What? I was wondering, when the voice came, the eyes had never gone, I was startled, thrilled, by an indefinable instinct that I would be saved. By a sudden impulse I began to pray, pray for forgiveness, forgiveness and life to repent. Lost in a deep reverie of prayer, a feeling of peace and joy came over me, as the music returned in a glory of sounds. And the Young Man, too, as first I had seen him, stood at my side; and the voice said:

"Poor humanity, in God's pity I have come to lead you forth to life. You are to live, though you will suffer,

suffer to repent. Arise my son, and follow ever so closely in my footsteps. Arise now, it is thy day."

I felt myself released. I arose, stood quite near Him, but a vast space seemed to be between us. He moved, moved backward, with his step I too, advanced. Then lo! with that first step rang forth in loud, full, golden toned chorus *Kyrie eleison! Kyrie eleison!*

We then moved more rapidly than at first, He ever facing me. I advanced steadily as if drawn along by some magnetic power. We left the room and entered the corridor, here the music met us, surging, waving, the richest harmony among the vaulted arches. And from afar came a faint echo, as of crystal bells chiming the *Ave Marie* from a marble campanile.

At each step onward I gained courage, strength, a firmness, until every doubt and fear had fled. And still the silvery music; and still the angel chorus. He led me to the chapel, then on to the altar rail, and I could see the amber rays from the richly tinted glass, dropping jewel-like upon the altar lace. Then the tinkling of a silver bell changed my thoughts; I fell upon my knees and raised my head. Before me, in flowing white raiment, stood Christ, as I had seen Him upon the cross of gold. He raised one slender hand above my head; from the other I was to partake of His life. At the same moment the amber light blazed in undiminished brilliancy. A shimmering aureole of golden radiance encircled the head, while the light enveloped the figure

like wreaths of woven sunbeams. An agony of shame fell upon me. I cried aloud "Oh deeply and bitterly I repent, dear Lord. I seek, I implore Thy forgiveness. I will bow to Thy will. Forgive, forgive I pray Thee, my Savior."

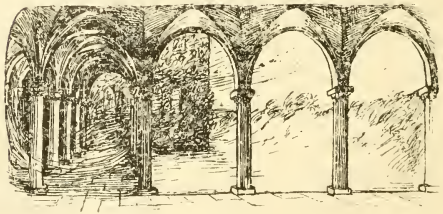
And the voice of Christ came:

"Walk in my footsteps, they will lead you through the path of right to life. Read My Word, doubt it never. You will then gain thy forgiveness and life everlasting. Now arise, and behold the dawn of thy new life."

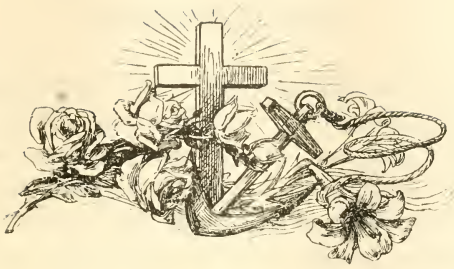
Again the silvery music and the angel chorus, the Young Man too, and again I was led over the way whence we had come. I felt myself falling, dropping upon the bed, and at the side my father was still kneeling, praying, and his

voice had a tremor of pain in it. Then I called to him "Weep no longer, my father, I am still your child. I repent, pray for me, pray with me, my father." And while we prayed the white doves, the celestial music, all, were wafted away amid clouds of amber light, leaving the burning eyes within my soul.

Candlemas
1911



The Hillside Shrine



The Hillside Shrine

OR days together, a fair dark eyed girl, walked the sweet-scented paths, through her garden of pleasure: girl and garden wrapped in sunshine. So, thought she, was all the world. But alas, one day Pleasure led her to the far away path circling the garden, and from there she wandered afar, until at last a day dawned dark

for the blighted one, and she then cried aloud: "I am forsaken. Pleasure and my lover, both so dear to me, and both have gone, gone, my betrayers, and they still will walk the sunny paths while I must hide my sorrow. As for me there is no Hope, and Faith too, has fled. Still there remains Charity, but upon her I will not let my heart dwell, for Charity, it is my belief, will turn from one stripped to the very soul of Faith, the bread of life."

The girl had fallen by the roadside, amid the myrtle and sweet wild shrubs of the hills, where too, the sound of rushing, bubbling waters could be heard, coming from just beyond.

Her silken garments were frayed and soiled, and her heavy dark hair had loosened, and lay like a mourning

mantle about her shoulders and arms. Her thin oval face shown white, as if carved in ivory,—whitened by despair. And again she cried aloud, to this end:

"Ah! I hear water, a lagoon there must be nearby. Water, I will find this, and drop myself beneath it. This will hide me from the world. Once, but it now seems long ago, I would have prayed, though not now, as I have lost all, Faith and Hope, and there is no Charity for me. Yes, I will hasten, find the water, and hide me in its depths."

The girl arose weak and trembling, she grew faint, then swayed, and would have fallen, but by instinct put out her hand, without knowing, without having seen, the hillside shrine by which she had fallen. The shrine with its cross

and image of the Blessed Mother, clasping her Holy Infant to her breast. This the girl now beheld, with its pure marble gleaming white beneath green boughs, and here and there, where the sun could find an opening, it was shining through and dropping like stars about the little Christ Child.

The girl's hand had grasped one wee foot that rested on the mother's arm. The cold of the marble sent a chill through her body. She raised her eyes, and beheld the shrine, but this time her cry was soft and plaintive:

"Oh, it was here they brought you, and I never knew, would never again have seen you my babe, my precious one, my life. And the hand of my lover, thy father, my little babe, wrought this shrine.

Listen, little babe, and I will tell you how, each day, while your father worked, he would cast aside chisel and hammer, that he might caress us, and praise our beauty. Then the next moment he would again be sending small chips from the block of glistening marble. 'His masterpiece,' he said it should be, and his love for us would ever live in the marble. And all the days he would sing sweet love songs to me, and bring bright flowerets to you, my babe. Oh my babe, and now you lay cold as the marble, in your tomb, and I, your mother, am forsaken by all, all but the sweet memory of you, and you my babe have called me back to life. And now that I have again looked in your sweet eyes I cannot hide beneath the waters, as then I could not meet thee, little

one, on the other side. So, I must struggle to find the right path for the very love of you. But where can I go, to whom can I turn? I am alone, alone in this vast world."

"Nay, nay, it is not so, I am here at your side. Look girl, I am an old friend of your world."

The girl, in surprise at a voice so near, turned, and lo! at her side beheld, as she believed, a gay, dashing cavalier in bright attire, with waving plumes of scarlet in his broad velvet hat. And this is what she said:

"You sir! why, I know you not, or whence you come, and do you not see I am unhappy and forlorn?"

"Yes, I heard you lamenting, and for that reason I am at your side to take you with me, I will be your lover, I

will deck you in fine linen and purple, and jewels shall bind your hair, and be clasped about your fair neck and arms. But you must come at once and quickly: do you not see dark clouds are gathering?"

While speaking he had caught a fold of the girl's gown, and at the same moment drew from beneath his long scarlet velvet cloak, a strangely wrought casket, filled with sparkling gems. At sight of these the girl trembled, and for a moment her eyes rested upon the gold and precious stones. She seemed to falter, and the tempter drew nearer, pushing the casket against her hand. With the contact a spark flashed. The girl felt the shock, and in fear pressed closer to the shrine, and again her eyes sought those of her marble

babe, whose little outstretched arms seemed to be offering shelter to her, his lonely mother, and again she cried aloud, and thus:

"Go sir, I care not for your offerings. Still, where can I go but with you?"

"Yes, where can you go, girl, and be happy. You are faded and in rags, where do you hope to find another lover to care for you? Can you not see I am the only one? But hist! you come, I will take you in my arms and fly from here, come."

As he spoke a heavy cloud dropped over the sun, and loud peals of thunder rolled above their heads, while a thick blackness settled over all. And a rushing of wind came down the hillside, swaying and bending the trees, and with the cracking and falling away of

their tender branches, dark, ill-omen night birds flew out with their heinous cries. They circled in the air but an instant, then, with drooping wings fluttered downward until they rested at the tempter's feet.

The girl in the greatest terror, pressed still closer to the marble, until her cheek laid against that of her babe. And she entwined her arms so closely about the little body that the marble gathered a warmth from her, which gave it a feeling of flesh, this thought flashed in her mind, and a new joy entered her heart. Thus she called out in the darkness:

"Go whoever thou art, take your gems, I hold the rarest of all here in my arms. My babe still lives, and for him I will suffer, even perish; but from

now till death I will guide my steps until I reach the place where the angels have taken him, then I will kneel to the precious one."

The cry had scarcely left her lips when the sun burst forth, sending out long rays of light, these quickly melted the darkness, and swept the storm clouds away.

The light was dazzling, and the girl with a feeling of awe turned to where the tempter had stood. He was no longer at her side, gone, gone she thought. But as her eyes became accustomed to the light, she saw he was bending low to the earth and creeping away towards a deep ravine whence the sound of rushing waters came. Then to the right she turned, and there beheld, coming towards her, five maidens, all

tall, slender, beautiful; clothed in soft white, trailing robes, with long, white, cloud-like veils fitted to their heads beneath wreaths of sweet alyssum. The long ends of their veils were waving liken to angel wings half folded. And the sunbeams gathered in the folds, shedding a golden light over all.

Each maiden carried in her right hand the symbol of her name, and lo! the ground on all sides, and the path they trod, suddenly became whitened with the same holy blossoms of which their wreaths were woven.

Slowly, silently, they glided, until they reached the shrine. There they paused at the side of the cross, and held out their symbols to the forlorn girl.

"Who are you? You are different from any I have ever known. Still,

you are all living women as I, but I feel that I could not touch a fold of your robe. Tell me quickly, have you come to taunt me with my rags and despair?"

This the girl asked in trembling tones, as she pressed even closer to her marble babe. And the maidens replied:

"Oh, we pray you not to have such sorrowful thoughts. You are our sister, we heard your cries and we have come. It is our work to shelter our forlorn sisters. It was not far; our house of mercy stands on the crest of the hill. We knew where to find you, as all stop when they reach the shrine."

"Your house of Mercy? Do I hear aright, will you be merciful to a fallen girl? one who until a moment ago had lost all faith and hope, and believed not in the world's charity to one who

had sinned, sinned for the love of a man."

"Yea, yea, sister, it is the pure of heart whom we seek and give our greatest care. And now sister, will you not come nearer? even stand in the sun's rays that we may see each other clearly. And we will prove the truth of our mission, we will give you our names, they shall pass your lips, and fill your heart to overflowing with a love that will give you new life. And you, sister, you can give your name and make known your trouble, or you can keep all a secret in your heart; it is the privilege we grant, we ask naught of the sorrowing ones."

The girl stepped forth in the sun's path. She had grown paler, until she was white as the marble mother. Too,

a great peace had settled on her delicate features, as she left the side of her marble babe, and stood in the light facing the Maidens. At the same moment a light gust of air caught some of the fragile white blossoms from the path, carrying them up in a little twirling shower, letting them fall like snowflakes over the marble mother and child; and one wee spray had dropped and remained in the babe's hand, as an offering to the living mother.

The maidens looked eanestly at the girl, and a sadness came into their eyes as they moved nearer, and one spoke in a gentle voice, saying:

"You poor blighted child, we clearly see your features in this marble mother, and the little Christ Child, he, too, has looked with your eyes upon the poor

wanderers who have stopped here to pray. But where is the child, surely you have not deserted him? We will love him; we will care for both."

And the girl said sadly:

"Oh do not pierce my heart. I have wept long days for my little dead babe. Dead in the same month I held him in my arms for this marble. His father praised my beauty, and fondled his son, until the masterpiece, as he called the shrine, was finished. It was carried away. The next day the atelier was dark and cold, my babe lay dead. I was alone, deserted, save by poverty and death. And you, who call yourselves my sisters, you now have my secret. To you I plead, beseech your love, for here against this cold marble my heart has warmed. I have regained

that which is most precious,—Faith and Hope."

And the maidens closed about the girl, and the first maiden said:

"And you, sister, you will be sacred to us, your sins forgotten, the shrine has purified the body, your soul was never tarnished. But before we enter the home you must learn our names. I will be the first to ask you to look upon my symbol. I will set it against your heart, then you can easily speak my name." And she kissed the cross in her hand, then placed it against the girl's breast.

"Oh the cross, the symbol of Faith. Faith then is your name."

"Yea, and Faith I will plant in your heart, that you may never more wander from the path of right."

And the second maiden did likewise, with her silver anchor, and the girl said:

"The Anchor of Hope. Ah, I know thy name is 'Hope.'"

"Yea, and I will plant Hope in your heart, that you may be lifted up and never again falter."

Then came the third maiden, Charity, with her calm white face, and she held to the girl's lips a Bleeding Heart, of whitened silver.

But from Charity the girl sought to shield her face, while she cried out in shame:

"Thou art Charity, and you come to me? And you were the first I denounced, denounced bitterly, and cast away."

"Yea, Charity I am called, and

Charity forgives, covers faults, that goodness may shine forth clearly. And you, poor girl, I will clothe in fullness, I will wrap about you my mantle, then soon you will become strong in the right, but Repentance must be thy name."

And the girl moaned, and tears fell from beneath her eyelids.

"And my name, said the fourth maiden, is Virtue, and I will share with you my Lilies. Hold them ever near, they will ward off Temptation."

But the fifth Maiden stepped from the circle, and gently clasped in her own, the girl's delicate hands. And the girl raised her eyes to the face of stern, pale Duty, standing silently beside her, and a cry left the girl's lips. Then Duty spoke:

"Yea, girl, it is thus with all, my name is quickly discerned, it is printed upon my face. But I will plant love in your heart. I will keep your hand in mine. I will ever lead you in my path. Yea, Duty will give unto her followers a blessed joy; a great happiness; religion; duty to God; life eternal. Yea, all this you will gather as you tread my path."

At last the girl looked up to the blue sky. Then through the still air came little drops of water, falling, falling. Softly they fluttered down, and dropped upon the girl's head.

Then Faith stepped from the circle, and spoke:

"Ah, sisters, these little drops are from the heavens, sent as a message. They have fallen upon her head, and

too, upon the cross. It is her baptism, and we, sisters, are the sponsors. And we now name this poor girl Repentance."

And the girl looked and wondered, for she had not thought of God in so long a time. Faith quickly understood the look, and knew that dark fear was in the girl's heart. Thus again she spoke:

"Repentance, my sister, cast all fear from you. You are now to go with us. You will be cherished and guided: be one of us in the house of our mother Mercy. And even now she awaits your coming, and we will take you to her fold. But first we will say our evening prayer at the foot of the shrine, as from now the little marble Christ Child will be even more sacred to us. And you the mother, kneel, and learn again to

pray. And while you pray, remember your living babe represented the Holy Infant of Bethlehem. Yea, ever more, let the memory of this be thy guidance, thy guardian angel."

Their prayers were softly chanted; the evening air wafted them to the heavens. Then the maidens arose, Faith and Hope, Charity and Virtue, and in their steps pale Duty led Repentance by the hand.

A light radiated about the girl, her eyes were dark, and clear, and bright. She stood erect: the old, old weariness was gone.

Slowly, gently, Repentance was led to the winding path on the hillside, then up, up, the white stepping-stones between the hedge rows of lavender and myrrh, until the summit was reached.

Tho' midway they had paused to look upon the shrine; but the sunset glow had veiled its beauty in an opalescent light.

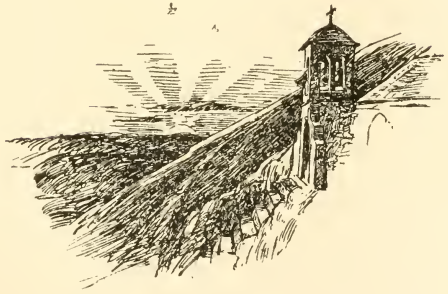
Then onward, Faith led the sister band, onward to the very portal, and there in the open Mercy stood, to receive the blighted one.

Faith and Hope, Charity and Virtue, awaited on either side, while Duty led Repentance to Mercy's tender care, and Mercy, in pity, lifted the long ends of her veil, and folded them about the girl's head as they entered the shelter.

For them the day was done, and with the closing of the heavy doors the mission bells swung out and in their stone arches, sending forth through the calm of twilight the vesper message. Then

the sweet bells had gone to sleep, leaving the evening star to keep vigil over the hillside shrine.

Bel-Air
Christmastide
1912



Legend of the Guiding Oak

Legend of the Guiding Oak

IN the garden on our grandfather's plantation, once stood a very magnificent oak, so tall, that one going through the country could see it for many miles away. For generations the country people all around had used it to direct strangers, or in counting mile marks. Thus it had been known for years and years by the mystic name, as mystically given—The Guiding Oak.

Its branches were many numbered, thick and far reaching, spreading out to such a degree as to make a dense shade over the greater part of the garden plat. Around its trunk a broad seat of cypress had been made, in the long ago, so long that it had become a soft silvery gray in color, and had grown so glossy, and smooth to the touch that one loves to sit on it and dream of the many little children who had played there in the shade,—their baby hands helping to give the polish that we admire today.

In my thoughts I picture all great and beautiful trees as having souls as we: with minds to gather in the rights and wrongs done them, and to me it is as cruel to fell one as to strike down a human being. Yet be this as it may, the Guid-

ing Oak has given evidence of being, as I say, with a heart filled with Faith, Hope, and Charity; and in the same heart a little corner filled with worldly thoughts, such as a vanity for its own beauty, its strength, and above all its value to mankind.

Truth to tell, our grandmother was a romancer, still this legend was found in her diary, with notes on the flyleaf pleading with all who might read to believe as she, in the truth, the strength, and the immortality of her beloved tree.

My Dream Life

THE LEGEND

THE fifteenth of June, and I am ten years old today. I was awakened early, even before the sun had time to dry the dewdrops or the white fog to float away. Awakened by old Uncle Henry, and my sweet birds which nest in the Guiding Oak. Uncle Henry, dear old man, had come to give me greetings and to bring a great bunch of Lilies of the Valley,—my birthday flower. So I hastily left my bed and opened wide the casements as he stood just beneath. I knew he would be there as every year since I can remember,—with the lilies tied to the end of a long willow cane that I could easily reach and untie.

"Good morning, Uncle Henry," I

called, while taking in my flowerets,—"how is Mammy this sweet summer morning?"

"Sprightly, right sprightly for an ole 'oman, bu' taint of mammy Ise a-thinkin', its about my honey chile. Now how is you little Miss? You is ten years ole now an' most a young lady, I specs you will soon be a-having beaux. But law me, Ise gwing fo' I hears Marsa callin', so mornin' honey chile, hurry up fo' yo' Pa is got you somethin' pretty."

"All right so I will, and come down at once." And this I did, to find my father awaiting me. He was sitting on the broad seat under my tree, with the mocking birds and robbins tripping all about.

First I had my morning kiss,—then

came my birthday gift, and it was you, my pretty book, the diary which I had seen and asked my father to give me today. And ah me! how pretty is your soft brown morocco cover with its delicate tracings of gold. Then too your sweet rose-tinted leaves, with their gold edges I love so much and upon you I mean to write my most secret, my best and dearest thoughts. I will go back to the days I first remember; I will even go back to my tea party days,—served under the Guiding Oak.

Ah! that is it, I will tell you our secret, though to none but you will I tell that my tree can see, can hear, and talk. But for its counsels I would have been a naughty child a-many times, and now, now I love and obey its teachings

and I am sure they are all for my good.

Yes, I shall write down all my life with you, my dear tree, that when I am old, old and forgotten, you may live in the thoughts of others.

This very day I will begin by writing of the first time you spoke to me. Ah yes! 'tis fitting that your first pages should hold the memory of that sad, sad day, the day my precious Mother was carried past you, down the garden walk, and left over there in the family lot: now more than six years ago. And still I can feel, and hear the thump, thump, of the blighted acorns which you let drop, like so many tears, as we passed beneath your boughs. Some you let fall upon the casket, and there they lay hidden amid the lilies, and forget-me-nots

which my dear father had placed upon the top to cover its cruel black. And some, I remember at least three, you let come thumping down upon my head. I was weeping and my father was leading me by the hand, dear father, you too were shedding tears of sorrow; but with the thumps of the acorns we both looked up, up to your topmost tip that seemed to little me must surely touch the blue sky. And as I lowered my head one acorn slipped from beneath the tangles of my curls, that one I caught and kept in my hand.

It was thus I was consoled, I wept no more that day. You had let the little saucer slip from the cup of your tear-drop, and this I would replace, then take from, all through the long sad day; it amused me, it took my thoughts from

my mother,—it was the first acorn I had ever noticed.

Then had come the sunset hour, and the soft twilight that followed. The hour when my father and mother were wont to sit beneath you on the broad seat. Ah me! that night we two were alone; I grew tired, then sleepy, Mammy came and wanted to take me, to put me to bed but I would not leave my father's arms so he pillowed my head on his shoulder and held me caressingly against his breast, my dear father, and he too heard my little prayer, then I fell asleep while his tears were fast falling upon my face.

I still held tightly in my baby hand your teardrop, my dear tree, and my curls touched the rough bark that covers your truly great heart, and it

must have been then you found the way to make me understand your language, when you said:

"Weep not little child, weep not for the dear mother, she still lives, she will be with you each day, each night, always with you as long as you are good, good and true; but you must never be false, either to yourself or others,—that alone will keep her from you. The dear God would then keep her in the heavens, she could not come to you. Thus as long as you love your mother be true, be gentle, be forbearing, and come to me each day: bring your sorrows, bring your joys, tell all to me, me the Guiding Oak, here in your father's garden. I will speak to you, I will be your Mother, she will come and live in me as long as you are

good and true. Now little child sleep, sleep softly, sleep sweetly, little motherless child."

Now my pretty book do you not feel grateful to be entrusted with my secret? But wait you, you have not heard one-hundredth part, now listen.

The next morning I awakened to find mammy and my father bending over my little bed, also that I still held the acorn in a tight grasp, and do you know I have it still,—the one that fell from my curls on that sad day. I will never part with it, I wear it sewed in a little silken bag, around my neck. But it has been great trouble to keep it safe from mammy, and at times I have been obliged to entreat my father to speak in order to keep my treasure, until now I am allowed to do as I

please—I am ten years of age, and Uncle Henry says I will soon be a young lady; but that is naught, sweet book, and I know you would much rather be told my secret.

Ah! tree, dear tree you were indeed a mother that next day. I remember how I ran down the garden walk, with the box on either side, so tall and thick that I could not see other than ahead or up, up to the sky. But the lilies stood in groups at the end, beyond you my dear tree. The tall white lilies that we all love so well, you are the children of the ones my mother planted when she first came here a young and beautiful bride; I know as my father has told me many times of her lovely thoughts and ways.

But of that next day. I reached you,

O tree, I climbed to the seat, then waited, waited for my mother to come, as I believed you meant she would. I waited, it seemed a long, long time, then I began to weep, the tears blinded me, I must wipe my eyes, this I did with the frill that trimmed my apron. In doing this the acorn which I had with me rubbed against my cheek; that turned my thoughts, I began to play with it, to look about. Then low and behold! there at my very feet were acorns many numbered, that had fallen and lay strewn through the soft grass and clover blossoms.

I was on my feet at once, but with the thought not to lose my one, the precious one, I twisted and tied it in a corner of my apron, then straightway began to gather up all others I could find, until

I had a great heap. This gave me much pleasure and kept me from becoming lonesome for a long time. At last I grew tired, so again thought of my mother, and again I wept. This time I sat upon the ground, near to your big arm which comes up through the earth, I laid my head upon it, the tears fell too upon your arm, dear tree,—then you spoke, you my mother, and you said:

"Up, up, little child, you should not weep, look about you, look at the sunshine, look at the flowers: God's dear little children they are and you, you too, belong to him. But you must not weep, you must not ask for that which He has taken; that which He does not give.

"Ah! dear little child, look at the birds, they too belong to Him, they

are happy, they are joyous, though they have but what He gives,—and they sing the live long day.

"Now up little child, your mother is with you, and she says:

"Run to the house Mary Elizabeth, run and ask mammy sweetly to bring out your little pewter dishes, and bread nicely spread with the sweet butter she churned before you opened your eyes this morning, and this day she may add a thin sprinkling of sugar to appease you, my baby. Tell her to bring all here, with a jug of milk, and here you can have a party for yourself and dollies. O yes, you must also have your dollies, they will be your guests, they will keep you company. Now run Mary Elizabeth, I your mother will await you here, here on the bench and will help

you with your party; but unless you are happy I cannot remain."

The voice I heard was distinctly my mother's, though it came from the tree arm beneath my head. I was at first startled, I sat upright and looked about, expecting to see my mother, no one was in sight, my little heart began to feel a fear. Then again the voice came, but this time from the acorn, tied as it was in my apron.

"Up, I say, Mary Elizabeth, up my baby and be merry and gay, for if you rebel, if you resist the will of your Heavenly Father, I cannot come to you, my precious baby. Now I will kiss you that you may know I am with you, little one."

Then what think you, my sweet book, I awaited my mother's kiss,—instead

came a wee bit of an acorn from over my head, I heard it dropping, I looked up, to catch it on my lips! My mother in the tree had sent down the kiss to me.

Ah yes it's true, and that kiss too I have in safe keeping with the other one that fell on my saddest day.

Thus I spent my baby days, with my mother tree to guide and love me and shield me from much. In mirth and sorrow, in health and pain, my dear mother has ever been with me.

Long ago I controlled my temper; long ago ceased to resist the higher power, and longer ago learned that if I were in doubt I had but to press an acorn

to my lips, and my mother's voice came to point the way.

ANOTHER fifteenth of June, again Uncle Henry and the flowerets and my singing birds. And five years too have passed since you first heard my secret, dear book, and much of the time you and I have travelled over the seas with my father, who thought thus to cast off his sorrow.

But now I am older, I can give him a greater comfort; I, and our dear tree, as I ask my mother each day, to guide me in my care of him. And he is be-

coming quite happy, he says it is my youth and beauty that is working the charm. My beauty! I think he only says that just to comfort me, I know I am without a spark of beauty as mammy tells me I am tall enough for a girl a year older than I, while she declares my eyes are like the white doe's we saw somewhere in an English park. And that my hair is neither brown nor gold, but just half of one and the other. Then my skin she says has not enough blood color,—it is too much like my mother's pure white, ivory-backed prayer book. But poor mammy! if I am warm and a pink spot comes on either cheek, then straightway I must go to my father, and he will feel my pulse to find if I have a fever. So you see, sweet book, I have my troubles,—

but never mind I also have much happiness, and today I am to have my first real party, a birthday party.

And too I have a new secret, listen; you know Bobbie Lee, he is the tall youth with dark gray eyes, and hair like a chestnut hull. We take long rides, you must know, on the beautiful horses our fathers gave us last Christmas,—we had a lovely one yesterday eve. Ah! I feel the pink spot coming now, as it did when he whispered the sweet words of his love for me, that was last night, after our return. After supper we sat on the seat under my mother tree, he spoke low, so low I could but catch his words. But my dear mother also heard and let drop two kisses, one fell in his hand, one amidst my curls.

He had asked if I did or could love him—that brought the pink spot. I was afraid he had guessed, but how could he know that I had loved him always. Yes, since the day we were swinging double in my swing and I slipped and fell to the ground. Bobbie picked me up the best he could and we sat on mother's arm; I with my head on his shoulder, while he kissed and petted me until my fear had passed. And now last eve he asked if I did, if I could love him enough to some day be his wife. Ah! dear Bobbie, I love you more than I can tell!

But now, sweet book, I must stop. My father calls: we are to go out to the garden to gather flowers, and to arrange the ground under my tree, as it is there we will receive our guests. Tomorrow

I will tell you of the party,—I will tell you everything, dear book.

AH sweet book! where shall I begin, I have so much to tell this day.

Father and Uncle Henry worked all morning clearing up the garden under the Guiding Oak, after I left you yesterday. I helped some in arranging the bower and festoons of roses, but my work was little as our dear tree had much to say, and the voice of my mother came to me so often. Then

again a wonderful something else I have to write on your leaves today, and too, none knows of it but myself.

My father was intent on weeding out everything that had sprung up amidst the grass under the oak tree, he said:

"I wish a smooth, velvety lawn to receive my guests on today, Henry, so gather in all the boys on the place and put them to work; then all can be finished in good time."

As father said this he looked over the ground, even looking under the broad seat, then exclaimed:

"Why bless my heart, Henry, is not that a wild muscadine vine growing there under the seat?"

"Ye' sah! it su' is dat. Ise righ' glad we's got him, 'case he's making fo' de Guiden Oak,—if he gits up da

its good-bye mister oak I tell you Masser."

With this Uncle Henry picked up a spade as he meant to dig the vine up with its roots. I was sitting on the cypress seat at the moment, and then the voice came:

"Mary Elizabeth," it said, "prevent them, they must not destroy the wild grape vine. Years and years ago, thoughtlessly, carelessly, I dropped the seed from which it has sprung, thoughtlessly then, but I know now it was for a purpose,—as so, God wills all things. But year after year it has been trampled on or cut down, it could never get as far as the Guiding Oak. There, quick, stop the spade, quick Mary Elizabeth, I your mother wills it."

I jumped up calling to Uncle Henry

to desist, I wished the vine to remain. To this he objected, my father also, as he too wished to protect the oak. But I insisted that it should not be touched, at last I conquered, the vine still lives.

And now listen sweet book. When the work was finished I returned to the seat, so did my mother, and she spoke thus, O so sweetly:

"My child you did well, I wish the vine to live as I have already told you. For years it has tried to reach the oak; at last the root has stretched to the seat, thus the vine has found a place of protection from trampling feet. It must be allowed to climb up my body, it must I say, even if it be my death."

Oh but dear tree! I could not live without you, my mother, I cried. Then listen my book,—the vine too spoke,

but in a voice I had never heard, a small, meek, plaintive voice, like a crying infant, thus:

"O dear oak save me, save me, I am thin, I am weak, how could I hurt your sturdy body? I am alone, with kindred no nearer than the forest. I am lonesome, I want to cling to someone; I have struggled, suffered pain and sorrow. I am broken in strength by the trampling of many. Each May Day I have crept up, up through our mother earth with the help of the sunshine, and the sweet dews of the nights.

"I am thankful to the Father of all for my life and the little sweetness that has come between the sufferings and wrongs felt in so many years. O dear oak help me, O I pray you help me great and beautiful tree."

Then my tree spoke thus:

"I am willing little vine, but you will first tell me how, as I see not how I, the greatest, the grandest, the most majestic tree in the land can possibly give help to a little bleached out, stunted wild vine of the woodland. Do you think of a way, little vine?"

"O yes, beautiful tree, now that I am not to be utterly destroyed I shall have the opportunity of living out my life. My heart I have kept pure, my mind unsullied. It may be true I am bleached out and stunted in body as you say, but how could I be otherwise, with the years of struggling to escape being entirely crushed. But believe me dear tree, I have lived, lived a great and beautiful life as neither my heart nor mind is stunted, both have grown and

expanded,—with the crushing of my body. Only try me, good tree, and give me thy help by letting me reach out my little tender arms until I can cling to your lovely self, than I will creep, creep up and around your strong body, then on up till I reach your topmost tip. Ah! me, will I ever be so happy as to be up, up above men's trampling feet, up almost to the blue sky? And now dear oak, if I can start to climb with love and trust in my heart I will grow so rapidly that I will soon reach out and mingle with the lovely foliage on your arms. Only try me, I am faithful, I am helpful; O great and beautiful tree can you not be charitable?"

"I will, yes I will although I heard the men say that if you were allowed to

cling to me you would sap my life; detract from my beauty, then I would no longer be admired. They all worship me today, I am their treasure, their friends come to see me, to admire me. I was talked of across the seas and my great beauty told of. I must think! can I risk all to help a little ugly, wild thing?"

"Ah well, great tree, so you will not be charitable. Perhaps you are right, I am poor and ugly now; but with your help, who can foretell, I may some day expand to a beautiful vine like my ancestors of the forest."

"That is the trouble little vine, if I were certain you would not do that very thing I would say, 'Come, cling to me you will not be seen creeping under my large, heavy leaves.' Thus none

would take notice of you; truly little vine I want to give you help, but I love my beautiful self, and I love to hear people extol my value, I cannot help it, it seems my right."

Now dear book I had listened to this in wonder as I had thought my mother everything that was good and pure, and somehow I felt grieved over the oak not being willing to help the wild vine; but the voice was not that of my mother,—in truth it was a strange voice. Then of a sudden I heard an acorn dropping down, I looked up as it passed in front of my face and fell into my lap. I caught it up and held it to my lips,—then my mother spoke:

"Ah Mary Elizabeth, have you listened to the oak and vine? And tell me, my child, are you willing to risk losing the

beauty of your treasured tree to help save the life, and give happiness to a poor little wild vine? Tell me, tell me your mother are you willing, and would you risk your own beauty to give aid to a little sick orphan child, as thus the vine is? Now speak truthfully my little one."

"Yes, twice yes, my dear mother, both I am willing to do. I love my mother tree, but I could not feel so secure in her love were she to let even a vine die beside her, without giving it her aid. And as for myself, try me, only try me, mother dear." O sweet book, then my mother's voice spoke again, thus:

"My own little babe, my precious child, you have indeed been true to my teachings. O little one, the first voice

was a feigned, a false one to try, to tempt you, my darling. I your mother will save the little wild vine, do you hear me little vine, come nearer, look up, and creep to me, we will all give thee help: the sunshine and dewdrops will be with you, and you Mary Elizabeth, you will see that it is not harmed by man or others."

To this I gave my promise,—and so I will.

Then again the little vine spoke:

"O I am thankful, grateful, and will do my best. I will give all that is mine, —love and gratitude. Still wait you, be patient, O beautiful tree, in time a power may be given me to prove my willingness, and true gratitude to you.

I am weary, I am weary now, and the light is all ahead, afar, afar you say.

Well be it so, only let me live within the shelter of your love; then Faith and Hope will do all else for me, dear tree."

"I'll grant your great desire,you poor little blighted wild thing, so come to me, come rapidly, but with a care that you do not scar your tender arms on my rough body." Thus spoke my mother tree,—then all was silence.

AND now sweet book I will tell you of my party. Ah me, it was lovely, so was my white frilled lawn. Father said that if I wished I could w e a r m y mother's pearl strands, but I did not as I had made a necklace to my liking, can you guess in what manner? Of course

not, so listen. For days I had saved the acorns as they fell, until I had gathered a goodly number; these I strung as beads to wear about my neck. They were very beautiful where the long strand hung over my white bodice, showing their soft gray-green coloring.

Now and again I touched them to my lips, then my mother's voice would come. Once when Bobbie and I had wandered away from the others, he caught my hand and was begging for my promise. I knew how well I loved him, but to say yea or nay, I knew not which, until my mother spoke, and she said "yea."

Ah my mother tree, what would I know if not for your counsels.

"Yea, my Mary Elizabeth, say yea, it is the dear God's will as you two

were formed as one, one life, one soul, divided into two bodies of earthly clay. You are to live as one being, with love and joy to stand between you, to walk at your side, to lead you over life's way. Give with your heart, your best-self, your love and trust; as he will give to you, my child."

I had stopped, with Bobbie at my side, down by the lily pond. He must have seen something in my face, and with a quiver in his voice asked:

"What is it Maybeth" thus he has called me always, as his childish tongue had formed my name in the long ago days. "What is it Maybeth? There is a strange, far away look in your eyes, and your lips quiver, my darling. Did you hear anything, did anybody speak? But no, of course not, we two are entirely

alone. Was it my question? let it not trouble you, I am too hasty, I can wait a day, a week; my love be happy today, I will speak to your father tonight, then you can give the yea. It will be yea, will it not, my other self?"

"Ah that is it. Ah Bobbie dear how did you know, how did you know to say it the same as I?

"Yea, it is yea Bobbie, as you are my other self we are only one in two bodies."

"How, why do you speak thus, Maybeth, as though somebody had prompted the saying?"

"You are right Bobbie, I was told that which I have repeated. And you, why did you call me your other self?"

"I know not, only with the thought that we two belonged to one another, and thus spoke my heart, dear one.

But with you it is different, you say you were told; by whom, pray, who but your father or mother would speak so to you?"

"My mother! so you have guessed it, Bobbie; still you will not allude to it before others,—let it remain a secret between ourselves, shall it not?"

"Indeed yes, though I do not understand your meaning, Maybeth: your dream as I take it, some sweet childish dream, will be safe in my keeping, my dear other self. O there again I have used the phrase, it dropped from my lips without my forming the words, though in truth with a strange feeling in my heart at the moment. And so my answer is yea, yea my dear one?"

"Yea Bobbie, and in truth to tell I could never have said nay."

And then sweet book the pink spots came, came and remained the balance of the afternoon, and until after Bobbie had gone. And why? because, dear book, my other self pressed so many kisses on my lips, cheeks and hands, that I even felt my face growing pink to the curls on my temples. But ah me! it was sweet, as indeed I love my Bobbie self so very, very much.

And father, my dear, dear father smiled upon us and gave his blessing; then said:

"You were surely intended for each other, and my dear children it is my belief you have loved since Bobbie was six and Mary Elizabeth three. But you must wait some years, perhaps when Maybeth is eighteen, and you Bobbie one and twenty."

"Ah I see, father you wish me to continue my studies with mademoiselle and with you, I consent. And by then Bobbie will have become a great scholar, is it not so?"

"Well perhaps, my child, and three years is not long. And it is my wish, also, that you remain here in your old home, we could not get along without Mary Elizabeth in our daily life: this you must know, Robert Lee, you cannot take her from the Guiding Oak."

"It shall be as you wish, sir. I am too happy to desire other than will please you and Maybeth" answered Bobbie bravely.

And then dear book, my other self and I went from the house down the walk to my mother tree, and there we

plighted our troth in the moonlit garden, with Love and Joy at our sides.

Thus ended my birthday party, dear book.

TWO years later, again the fifteenth of June.

I was awakened by my singing birds, the birds alone,—the first birthday in my memory not to find Uncle Henry beneath my window. He, dear old man, could not come, he is sleeping in the family lot, beside old mammy, and his grave is white with my flowers: today I gave them to him as he was wont to give to me. By another year they will

bloom for him on the grave, I will plant them when the north wind blows.

There: I cannot write more today, as I see Bobbie riding up the avenue. He will expect me to meet him, to receive his greetings and his flowers,—O Bobbie I love you more and more each day!

O SWEET book, how can I tell you, how can I write it? Ah me, I fear my heart will break, I am so sad, so sorry; but listen I will try.

When I left you yesterday to receive my true love, my other self, I was surprised to find the sun hidden under a

heavy, dark cloud, and a storm coming. Indeed it was upon us, father said, without a moment's warning. It had come swiftly up the valley with a great rush of wind. We could hear the moaning of the trees, as they were swayed and bent and strained, as the wind swept through the gorge—with the sound of a lashing sea. At last it reached our garden, and all unrestrained spent its fury switching and lashing our noble trees. My mother,—the dear Guiding Oak—bending gracefully, grandly, and the while protecting the wild grape vine. Ah the poor little vine, you are indeed a miracle. None would have believed that within two years time you could have climbed half way up my mother tree, and crept around her many arms. O little vine

who will care for you now if my mother lives no longer.

There, you have been told, pretty book; but wait, you have not heard all.

The wind rushed on and on, uplifting the shrubs, pressing down the sweet tender flowers to the earth,—and brought desolation, as the very air appeared to darken and grow cold. The wind too, had spent its strength for a time. All were silent, the wind, the trees, all,—as from some great fatigue.

Father, Bobbie and I, were watching from the casement, my hands were cold, as on our saddest day. Darker grew the sky, a low, long rumbling sound came to where we stood. I grew faint with a sickening fear; my father caught and held me in his arms as the worst happened.

The heavens opened, letting out a great streak of fire, I felt it coming, my eyes were upon it. I could hear the heavy throbs of my heart. I clung to my father, watching, waiting,—for what I knew not. The great light narrowed as it left the heavens, and hung the briefest time midway to the earth: then down, down came that glowing spear of light, darting across the garden, then down, still down until it struck the wet earth beyond. With it a loud, long peal of thunder, a rush of wind,—a crash of falling timber. Then I heard no more, I laid as one dead in my father's arms. I too had felt the shock, felt it in my heart; but I live. O my mother, O my mother tree! Father, Bobbie, both dropped the words softly, gently, to let me know from them the sad

meaning of the crashing sound: that the cruel spear of light had cut a path straight through the heart of the Guiding Oak, midway to its topmost tip. Broken, fallen, crushed, and now all lay upon the ground,—the uppermost part, the great guiding arms of my mother tree.

That was the last, the storm had done its heartbreaking work, then passed into the vast beyond.

Ah me, how sad to think of the broad, untouched land back of the garden plat: could not that fiery bolt have found a broader path than through the heart of the Guiding Oak?

O, I feel a revenge, an aversion to the very heavens. Could not God have willed it otherwise than first to take my true mother, then to crush down my

mother tree? O, I fear to think, I fear me there may be no God as I am taught to believe. I fear, I tremble, I grow sick. I cannot write more: I will go to my poor blighted oak, my mother's voice will guide me,—guide my thoughts from temptation.

AFTER leaving you, pretty book, I walked down the garden path; all seemed new, I felt me in a strange land,—the blue sky showed clear and bright overhead, where the oak towered but two days before. And the lilies, the tall white lilies, are no more, they too were broken and crushed; and now their delicate white blossoms and long green stalks

lay covered with sand and clay. These I passed by with the wonder if my dear young mother could see, could know.

I reached the Guiding Oak, O dear tree! you can no longer be called thus—only in memory. You are already spoken of as the Great Blasted Oak.

I sat me on the cypress seat and looked about,—the broken arms! some in a heap, some scattered afar out, then tossed by the winds: and everywhere the blighted acorns, great and small.

At sight of them and the exposed white of my dear tree's heart, I grew more bitter than ever before.

Why, O why should this be? I do not believe it was God's work. I am sick, I wish my mother, will she come? Can you come, mother voice, through your prostrated body?

As I cried thus, a small blighted acorn, a teardrop, fell at my feet: and a voice came, a thin, soft, pleading voice and it said:

"Mary Elizabeth, cease your repining. Do you not remember that years ago your mother said if you resisted and rebelled against your Heavenly Father's will she would not, could not, come to you, and now what are you doing? Your mother is grieved, grieved for you, her little child, and she cannot give it help."

"Yes, yes I remember, I had forgotten. But why did God take my mother tree?" I asked.

"A voice, only a voice, Mary Elizabeth, from the wild grape vine. As I have said, you cannot hear your mother's voice while you have such thoughts in your heart as are now there; and dear

child do you think your mother tree will love you unless you are pure of thought and keep a Christ-like forbearance in your heart?

If you will listen I will tell you of greater trials than you bear."

And I answered, "I will listen, little vine," so again the strange thin voice:

"You remember the day you saved the life of the bleached, stunted vine of the woodland, look up, look at me now. Do you not think I have struggled to attain this height? Do you think I enjoyed having your friends stand there and admire and extol the beauty of the Guiding Oak, and never even mention me? But if they did perchance speak of me it was to draw someone's attention to my existence, and all would say I should not be allowed to climb up the

oak, that I detracted from its beauty, I would sap its life.

Believe me, it required all my strength to attain this height, and at the same time hold fast to Love and Gratitude; and harder still to prevent Jealousy creeping up and hiding beneath my tiny leaves. And now victory was nearly won; within a few weeks, a few months, I would have reached the topmost tip, —now I can never go farther than you see me. But I do not regret, I only rejoice that the time, the power, is mine to prove my willingness to give, to give all to our mother tree.

Do you not see her poor bleeding body, lacerated and torn, exposed to the sun, the insects, and the ones who so admired her in the days of her glory?

Now who can, who will care for and

protect her bleeding heart, who think you, Maybeth? I will tell you, it will be none other than the little bleached out, stunted vine! I will do this. I will creep on and on, making a thick covering over her wounds; I will give shade to her broken body; I will festoon myself from her poor scarred arms and drape her body with my softest leaves and tendrils. Then all will still admire her exquisite breadth, and deep shade beneath.

And now know you this forever more. All great and beautiful things; all lesser and poorly things, must drop from their places and sit lowly, before reaching their Father's mansion. So down, down on your knees, Mary Elizabeth, and pray the dear Father in heaven to forgive, to take from your heart the evil

you allowed to enter. Kneel quickly, and pray as you were taught by your own true mother, little child."

Ah me! that last was said in my mother's voice; I knelt, I prayed, and my mother sent down a tear.

And now, pretty book, my heart is light,—I am forgiven.

ANOTHER fifteenth of June; a gloriously beautiful summer day. My eighteenth birthday,—my bridal day. And for me the roses, the lilies, the flowers, vines and shrubs, and all else that ever bloomed, have blossomed their fullest, their sweetest: the air is filled with their sweetness, and resounds with the songs

of my many birds. And too my mother tree and the wild grape vine are resplendent in their beauty.

Ah, my poor blasted oak still lives, and is of a greater beauty; it is even now taller than any other in the garden.

My father had her arms trimmed and shaped in such a way that to strangers the top appears quite natural. Then too it has branched out to a greater degree,—as many as a hundred persons can be sheltered within its shade; and the vine has covered all scars. O dear little vine, none would have dreamed of

you ever being so magnificent. Your graceful festoons and sweet purple fruit are admired now as much as the Guiding Oak ever was.

Your life, little vine, belongs to my mothers, the real and the mother tree. One prevented you being uprooted, she knew that which we did not: the other gave you her sheltering love and you now cling to her body, as the years roll on and on.

And now today an altar has been erected beneath the broad arms, white and flower-trimmed, and there I, your little child, and my other self, knelt and exchanged vows which none but God shall put asunder.

Ah the good, the Great One, who knoweth all things!

AND still another fifteenth of June, and another two years have slipped away, these as if on butterfly wings,—as indeed it seems to my other self and me. Two years of unutterable happiness, a joy born of Truth and Faith, Love and Forbearance. O Bobbie, my dear, dear husband, my loyal other self, —and the other, a wee bit of an elf, born in its father's image: it too has dark gray eyes and nut brown hair.

Can you guess, pretty book, do you guess my wonderful happiness? You cannot, I must tell it to your rose tinted leaves. Yes, tell that I, Maybeth Lee, holds a little child to my breast, to nourish it to strength, to shelter and guide it to our Father's mansion. I, a mother. Ah, is it not a holy office?

And Bobbie, he is awed and almost

frightened. He prays, prays more fervently than ever, for strength to follow his father's teachings: that he may not fail in his great and holy responsibility of guiding a son's footsteps. Another Robert Lee. And my own dear father, too, is happy, happy in our peace and love.

Last night Bobbie carried the little elf in his arms, we strolled down the garden walk to my mother tree, and sat on the cypress seat,—sat as did my father and mother in the joyous days of their youth, and I the little elf. It was my father's hour, we knew he would come to us, to watch the sun drop and the shadows spread until they covered the earth. Soon I heard his footsteps on the gravel, I looked up with a strange feeling in my heart. As I looked a

shadow, a vapor-like shadow, arose from the ground and floated at his side. Of this I will tell none but you, sweet book, so listen—

On came my father, with his straight, erect bearing, and light springy step. His silvery hair brushed off his temples and laying soft, but unruffled on his brow. I thought him somewhat pale, with a dreamy expression. Then in a moment he was with us; but no word did he say, only a little sigh escaped his lips as he sat down beside me,—with the shadow in between.

Ah me! can I tell even you, my rose leaves, that this vapor-shadow had, in my eyes, taken the form of my own precious mother, as I was taught to know her. I felt no fear, but my hands grew cold and trembled, all unlike ever before.

The sun dropped and crept away, and the gold, with rose and gray tinted the sunset clouds. Still the vapor shadow remained, and a silence was with us that seemed to soften, almost to still, our hearts. Then had come the purple light my mother loved in her living days, and too with it her sweet voice, and it spoke thus to my heart, little book:

"Ah! Mary Elizabeth, my little child, you are indeed blessed and thus you will be for many, many years; though one will soon go from you, go to come to me. Grieve not when the time comes for the passing as it will be my joy, my resurrection, and his.

"You have done much, all that one could to fill another's place,—and it is recorded. But only the briefest time

will all be as today with you. After the passing I, your mother, may not be able to come to you, as then our lives—your father's and mine—will have just begun in the purple light of the far beyond.

"And in time, if your path grows steep and rough, little one, keep to the center and look up while asking your heart for guidance: it will never fail to point you to the simple right as long as you remember my teachings. And my teachings are now yours, you are in my place, you are a mother, you have been given the holy office of teaching a little child, to guide its little feet in the path of right. Ah! Mary Elizabeth, be true to your father and mother, be true to yourself, and remember the simple right."

As my mother uttered the last, the voice and vapor shadow floated away. The purple light faded and a gray mist came of a sudden, and enveloped the land.

All had been so thoughtful, so quiet; we did not notice the changing until my mother tree sent down an acorn, and it fell upon the little elf, who laid sleeping in its father's arms,—as another little child, so long ago.

My little elf stirred, then cried out, thus we were brought from our dreams. And my father, O my dear father, called out:

"Arise and to the house, my children, the night has fallen."

ANOTHER year has gone and my rose leaves not touched in that time; but today I must tell you my last. Not in grief, not in sorrow did I lay my dear father away,—ah me! not with my mother's words imprinted in my thoughts could I be so selfish as to wish him with me.

And I, I have so much, I have my other self and our little elf, he took his first step today and can lisp his dear father's name. Ah my babe, my little one, I must watch that I do not fail in my care of you. There I hear you now, you want mother, so my sweet pretty book, my sweet rose leaves, you I lay aside as I belong to him. But you I will keep, keep and treasure, as between your covers my mother's spirit, with the sweet memory of my dear father's love,

rest upon your leaves. Then too the mysteries of the little vine and the Guiding Oak,—my mother tree.

Ah yes, you are indeed dear to me.

Thus I close you tenderly, and lay you away, and now it is adieu, adieu my pretty book, tonight and forever more.

Thus, in my Twilight Study,
I dreamed of Life, Life of the Dawn,
Life of the Dusk.

Bel-Air, 1910-1914

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